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Ibridismo

Long waits in anterooms to the heavens
and brisk hops across Europe,
then the chiaroscuro of Puglia,
Saracens, Normans, talks on *ibridismo*.

Outside a miked, deconsecrated church,
Vespas thread Bari Vecchia,
walled maze branching and slanting ...
I listen to a woman with a tortured face

who holds a cigarette between tar-
jittery fingers and waves it
in the direction of battle as
ferries crisscross the Adriatic.

Rows of tents outside the airport.
'For refugees, Kosovar', explains this stranger
who appoints himself – *grazie mille* --
my craggy guide. The city

maps on to the veins of his capable hands.
He has a maker's passion for boats
and the imbrications of Arabic culture.
Our bits of languages

begin to fit like pieces of a plate
broken by a host in ancient times
-- one part for the guest – in the hope a figure
would stand on his family's threshold

some day, any day, presenting a shard.

Bari 1999—Durham 2017

Trios

1

A wake of trios,
lingering thirds,
after-omens:

three military planes
at dusk, low over
fields at Ickworth;

three flights: the latest
to brooding, shadowy,
baroque Catania;

many slogs along mainly
three motorways,
through sun, rain, dark.

2

I've taken myself back
to where I grew up,
the Mersey at the

horizon-wide
road end, endlessly
mirroring mood,

with stopovers
here and there, fells
tracking my stride,

and once at Appleby
for an afternoon where
I bought two volumes of

Arthur Symons, 'Is it
your face, is it a dream?',
(sortilege of a kind

as the stiff white pages
fell open), and a book
whose name I've forgotten.

3

Through the plane's rush, over
engine noise, between steps,

I've tried to hear advice

you might have wished,
rather urgently,
as could be your way,

to impart from
your new home
in the earth or the air.

And if, sleeping,
I hugged your phantom
once, twice, and then

three times, would your
Homer-loving father not
have glanced at you,

were you both to look on
gravely, indulgently,
not quite detachedly?

Two Rooms

Yours is spacious, with, in one corner, a table
and two blue easy chairs angled
as though for a consultation.

I was less keen on the carpet mulch -
threatened one of my ocular episodes –
but the male nurse arrived, holding aloft your dinner.

You waved it away, fastidious as a dandy.
My room has an Adelphi draught (pane missing),
and a sighting of the two Cathedrals.

High-ceilinged, with a botched holy painting,
yours belongs to a grand house rising from flat lands
a few miles to the north, an establishment

run by the Augustinian Sisters of the Mercy of Jesus;
there's a small fridge beside your bed, with space
for six bottles of white wine. I've added a few

along with other gifts: satsumas, crisps,
grapes from Chile, chocolate, a sketch-pad, crayons.
Back at the hotel my notebook's on charge

and iPhone too ... I'm scribbling this
on a napkin in a place off Hope Street,
having a break from doing my bit

during your respite stint, recalling how
you looked cared-for, abandoned, gaunt, and saintly
as you eyed a crucifix, a 'great companion'.

